



# TRAINING BULLETIN

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## WELFARE CHECKS

### BACKGROUND

Police work involves not only preventing and investigating crime, but also providing services to the public by helping those in need, including welfare checks. Welfare checks allow officers to check on someone's well-being within the limits established by the Fourth Amendment concerning an individual's constitutional rights.

When a person is concerned about the well-being of someone they have not heard from or are unable to reach, they may call the police and request a welfare check. These types of calls may originate from a variety of sources, including but not limited to:

- Family members
- Spouses
- Significant others
- Friends
- Co-workers
- Doctors
- Neighbors

Dispatch will obtain pertinent information from and about the person initiating the welfare check so that responding officers are able to report back with their findings. Here are some examples of why welfare checks may be initiated:

- Elderly person (living alone and unresponsive to contact)
- Possible suicide attempt
- Observed or reported mental health crisis
- Suspected drug overdose
- Medical emergencies (e.g., heart condition) with no response to contact
- Possible child neglect or endangerment

### PROCEDURE

Before arriving at the location, officers should gather as much information as possible, including contact information of the person reporting. Officers will maintain contact with the reporting party whenever that option presents itself to verify welfare and update on findings. Other pertinent information can be used to enhance general awareness, including but not limited to: medical conditions, mental health concerns, other occupants, access to weapons, and substance abuse issues.

Some additional points to consider while conducting a welfare check:

**Officer Safety:** Tactically, welfare checks should not be treated any differently than a criminal investigation. Situational awareness should be prioritized at all times.

**Location:** Officers should verify the correct address when possible. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) or back houses may potentially be an issue because the address numbers are not always clearly displayed. Managers or neighbors are resources that should be contacted for further information if officers are unsure.

**Canvassing:** If contacting the subject is unsuccessful, officers should exercise due diligence to obtain as much information as possible. Contacting neighbors or building managers can lead to useful information such as reviewing their cameras. Visual assessment can help officers determine if there has been a lack of activity by the subject:

- Open door/window
- Excessive mail
- Excessive packages
- Undisturbed vehicle
- Notices posted on door
- CCTV

**Person Reporting:** Officers shall attempt to contact the person reporting for further information when they are unable to contact the subject of the welfare check.

### **Dispatch Procedures**

Dispatch for Welfare Checks will be handled via normal procedures unless mental illness is involved, or suspected to be involved, when the call is received. Mental illness calls will be managed through Communications Division and assigned accordingly through the Mental Evaluation Unit (MEU). Systemwide Mental Assessment Response Team (SMART) units, from MEU, will respond to calls involving suspected mental illness and:

- Violent subjects;
- Armed subjects posing a risk to the public;
- *Welfare checks*;
- Subjects potentially committing criminal acts due to mental illness;
- High-risk behavior (e.g., barricaded situations or unsecured individuals on elevated platforms); and/or,
- Critical incidents where SMART may assist with de-escalation.

### **Assessment**

Officers should obtain as much information as possible from dispatch, reporting parties, or witnesses. Key details include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Nature of the concern (e.g., suicidal ideation, erratic behavior, lack of contact);
- History of mental health issues or prior police interactions;
- Presence of weapons or history of violence;
- Investigative details (e.g., talk with neighbors, check for anything unusual (accumulated mail, open doors/windows, etc.); and/or,
- Whether there is an immediate risk to the individual or others.

At any point during the welfare check, if officers reasonably believe mental illness to be involved, they should contact the MEU Triage Desk and/or SMART units to assist in the response. When an officer receives information that a welfare check is being requested for a person suspected of suffering from a mental illness, the officer, when reasonable, shall conduct a search of the Automated Firearms System, or AFS, to determine whether the subject of the welfare check is a registered owner of a firearm.

### **Conducting the Welfare Check**

During the *approach*, officers should announce their presence as well as their purpose in a clear and calm voice. Use de-escalation techniques to establish communication and build rapport. If the individual is believed to be inside and does not open the door, attempt to communicate through other means (e.g., phone, family, or neighbors). If communication fails and there is no immediate danger, consult with a supervisor.

Upon disposition, officers should document important information in the call summary, such as recording observations, interactions, and the justification for any actions taken, especially if entry is made.

### **Making Entry**

When conducting a welfare check, officers may enter a location under the following conditions: consent, or exigent circumstances (such as emergency aid). Under exigent circumstances, the primary purpose of the officer's entry is to attend to the emergency situation. An officer may not enter or search a residence unless there is an objectively reasonable belief, based on the totality of the circumstances, that entry and/or a search is required. The officer should be able to clearly articulate those reasons. Searches pursuant to welfare checks under the above conditions should not generally be used as a "tool" to further criminal investigations. Welfare checks are not criminal investigations, they are life-saving interventions.

Before making entry, officers should consider the following:

- Having at least two officers before entering a residence;
- If applicable, requesting additional unit(s) for a "building search"; and,
- Engaging other resources, such as air support.

**Consent:** Officers may enter a location if consent is freely given by someone the officer reasonably believes has authority over the location. Officers should clearly document who provided consent and the circumstances under which it was obtained.

**Emergency Aid Exception/Doctrine:** The emergency aid exception to the Fourth Amendment allows officers to enter a location if:

1. The police officer[s] had objectively reasonable grounds at the time of the entry or the search to believe that there was an emergency at hand and there was an immediate need to protect others or themselves from serious harm; and
2. The search's scope and manner were reasonable to meet the need and limited to addressing the emergency.

### **After the Welfare Check**

If the subject of the welfare check is located and there is no emergency, officers shall handle the contact according to normal procedures. If a subject in need of immediate medical treatment is located, request a rescue ambulance immediately and render aid. Once the subject is transported out of the residence, ensure that the residence is secured, and pets are left with a responsible adult, when feasible. If a deceased subject is located, notify the Area Watch Commander, Coroner's Office, and if feasible, any next of kin.

If force was used during the welfare check, ensure compliance with Department protocols. If mental illness was believed to be involved, officers should document the incident thoroughly after contacting MEU. After resolution and when practical, the primary unit will note the MEU report number in the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) Summary Report or Daily Field Activities Report (DFAR).

Lastly, officers should detail the basis for the welfare check, all actions taken, and any legal justification for entering and/or searching the premises in the call disposition.

Connect to Resources:

- Share mental health service information, such as the MEU website. It can be accessed through the Quick Response (QR) code labeled "**Mental Health Resources**" on City-issued cellphones or by scanning the QR code to the right.
- Consider a referral to MEU's Case Assessment Management Program (CAMP) for follow-up/case management.



### **Additional Considerations Regarding Mental Illness**

The 40-hour Mental Health Intervention Training (MHIT) course can assist officers in staying updated on relevant case laws. Working with community partners such as Department of Mental Health (DMH), National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), Autism Society of Los Angeles, Alzheimer's Association, and other mental health organizations can improve outcomes.

Officers should always prioritize safety while respecting constitutional rights. By adhering to these guidelines, officers can conduct welfare checks with persons in crisis in a lawful, compassionate, and effective manner, minimizing risks while providing necessary support to individuals experiencing a mental health crisis.

Officers are reminded that it is not a criminal act to express suicidal ideations, attempt to end one's own life, or self-mutilate in the State of California. It is not a criminal act to express the desire or even attempt to die by suicide within one's home, and suicidal subjects or persons suffering from a possible mental health crisis are afforded the same constitutional rights as everyone else. A subject's mere refusal of treatment for a possible mental health crisis or a refusal to take prescribed medication does not necessarily require immediate police action nor does such refusal constitute a crime.

### **CONCLUSION**

Welfare checks are a tool to build public trust between the public and the Department by providing a service to assist people in need. Officers should continue to thoroughly document any investigation related to a welfare check while remaining tactically and legally sound. Welfare checks help to further our Department's core value of "Service to Our Communities."

**This Training Bulletin rescinds and supersedes Volume LIV, Issue 1, Welfare Checks, July 2025**

Field Training Services Unit  
Police Training and Education Group

DISTRIBUTION "A"